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# Food Stamp Leavers Research Study—Study of Nonwelfare Families Leaving the Food Stamp Program in South Carolina

## Final Report

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### Abstract

This report presents the results of a study of about 900 nonwelfare families who left the Food Stamp Program (FSP) in South Carolina between October 1998 and March 2000. Nonwelfare families were defined as families who did not receive any benefits under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program in the 12 months before leaving the FSP. The families were surveyed about 12 months after they left the FSP. The study results show that more than 80 percent of the respondents who were still off of food stamps were either working or living with an employed adult. Employment rates were much higher for Blacks than for Whites. More than 80 percent of the respondents who were working and still off of food stamps were working at least 30 hours per week. Among the unemployed who were still off food stamps, the most common reason for not working was the health condition of the respondent. Many respondents reported an increase in minor hardships since leaving the FSP but a few reported more serious hardships.

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The opinions expressed in this report are those of the authors.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

This report presents the findings of a study of 899 non-welfare families who left Food Stamps in South Carolina between October 1998 and March 2000. Non-welfare families were defined as families who did not receive any benefits under the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program in the 12 months before leaving Food Stamps. Information on the families was gathered through telephone interviews conducted by the MAXIMUS Survey Research Center between October 1999 and April 2001. The study examined two “cohorts” of Food Stamp leavers, as follows:

- families who left Food Stamps between October 1998 and March 1999 (“Cohort One”); and
- families who left Food Stamps between October 1999 and March 2000 (“Cohort Two”).

The tracking of two consecutive “exit cohorts” of Food Stamp leavers is consistent with the approach taken by the South Carolina Department of Social Services (SCDSS) in its earlier studies of TANF leavers. This approach is useful for examining whether outcomes among program leavers are affected by such factors as changes in economic conditions or program policies. With regard to economic conditions in South Carolina, the average monthly unemployment rate during the surveys of the 1998-1999 leavers was 4.2 percent. During the surveys of the 1999-2000 leavers, the average monthly unemployment rate was slightly lower at 3.6 percent. No major changes in the state’s Food Stamp policies were implemented between the two survey periods.

### A. POLICY BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Nationally, Food Stamp caseloads as well as TANF caseloads have declined significantly in recent years. While researchers have conducted numerous studies of TANF families who have left welfare and Food Stamps, relatively little attention has been focused on non-TANF families who have left the Food Stamp program.

#### 1. USDA Research Program to Study Food Stamp Leavers

In 1998, the Economic Research Service (ERS) of the U.S. Department of Agriculture awarded grants to four states to conduct research on Food Stamp leavers: Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, and South Carolina. Each of the four states focused on different segments of the Food Stamp population. The South Carolina Department of Social Services chose to focus on two major groups: non-TANF families and Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs).

Data for the national Food Stamp program for 1997 show that about 21 percent of all Food Stamp cases involved non-TANF families, defined as cases that included children but in which the family was not receiving welfare benefits. A study by the Food and Nutrition

Service (FNS) shows that non-welfare families have increased as a percentage of all families receiving Food Stamps.<sup>1</sup> Between 1994 and 1997, the number of single parents who were on Food Stamps *and* receiving welfare declined by 27 percent. In contrast, the number of single parent families who were on Food Stamps but *not* receiving welfare increased by 9 percent. FNS attributes the difference primarily to the effects of welfare reform.

## 2. Specific Reasons for Studying Non-Welfare Food Stamp Leavers

While non-welfare families on Food Stamps are not subject to the time limits and new work requirements introduced by PRWORA, their status and well-being after leaving Food Stamps is still of concern to policy makers. The current study of non-welfare Food Stamp leavers in South Carolina was designed to address the following key issues:

- Are non-welfare families who leave Food Stamps meeting their financial and nutritional needs?
- Is there evidence that leaving Food Stamps is associated with negative outcomes for the well-being of children?
- How many of the families who have left Food Stamps may still be eligible for Food Stamps but are not re-enrolling?
- How many of the families who are still eligible for Food Stamps are not accessing benefits because of “administrative hassles”?
- How do one-parent and two-parent families compare in terms of their experiences after leaving Food Stamps?
- What types of non-welfare families are returning to Food Stamps (recidivism) and why?

## B. SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS

This section presents a summary of the key findings from the surveys. Section C provides a brief discussion of the policy implications of the findings.

### **Food Stamp Recidivism (Return to Food Stamps) Was Highest Among High School Drop-Outs, Younger Persons, and One-Parent Families**

At the time of the follow-up surveys, almost 26 percent of the families in Cohort One and almost 29 percent of the families in Cohort Two reported that they were back on Food Stamps. Among Cohort One, almost 28 percent of the respondents from one-parent cases were

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<sup>1</sup> *Who is Leaving the Food Stamp Caseload? — An Analysis of Caseload Changes from 1994 to 1997*, Food and Nutrition Service, Office of Analysis, Nutrition, and Evaluation, March 1999.

back on Food Stamps, compared to only 23 percent of the two-parent sample. Similarly, almost 34 percent of the one-parent cases in Cohort Two were back on Food Stamps, compared to only 24 percent of the two-parent cases.

Education had a substantial impact on Food Stamp recidivism. About 39 percent of high school drop-outs in Cohort One were back on Food Stamps, compared to 24 percent of persons who had completed high school only, and 11 percent of persons who had attended college. For Cohort Two, almost 41 percent of high school drop-outs were back on Food Stamps, compared to 25 percent of persons who had completed high school without going to college, and 30 percent of those who had attended college. Recidivism was also affected by age. In Cohort One, about 37 percent of respondents aged 18-29 were back on Food Stamps, compared to 16 percent of respondents aged 40 and older. In Cohort Two, almost 38 percent of the persons aged 18-24 were back on Food Stamps, compared to only 19 percent of persons aged 40 and older.

### **More Than 80 Percent of the Persons Who Were Still Off Food Stamps Were Either Working or Living with an Employed Adult at the Time of the Surveys**

Among both cohorts, about 83 percent of the persons who were still off Food Stamps at the time of the surveys were either working or living with an employed adult. In Cohort One, almost 84 percent of the respondents in *one-parent cases* were either working or living with an employed adult, including 78 percent who were working themselves. Among the *two-parent families*, only 61 percent of the respondents were working themselves, but 85 percent were either working or living with an employed adult. Similar results were found for Cohort Two.

### **Employment Rates Among Persons Still off Food Stamps Were Much Higher for Blacks than for Whites**

Among Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps, 82 percent of blacks in one-parent cases reported that they themselves were working at the time of the surveys, compared to only 64 percent of whites. In Cohort Two, the corresponding percentages for one-parent cases were 81 percent for blacks and 69 percent for whites. In two-parent cases, 71 percent of blacks in Cohort One were working, compared to only 54 percent of whites. The percentages for two-parent cases in Cohort Two were 67 percent for blacks and 58 percent for whites.

### **Education Also Had a Major Impact on Employment Among Persons Still off Food Stamps**

Education had a major impact on employment rates among respondents still off Food Stamps at the time of the surveys. Among Cohort One, only 58 percent of the high school drop-outs in one-parent cases were employed, compared to 80 percent of persons who had completed high school only, and 89 percent of persons who had attended college. Among Cohort Two, 61 percent of the high school drop-outs in single-parent cases were employed, compared to 80 percent of persons who had completed high school without going to college,

and 92 percent of those who had attended college. In two-parent cases, education had somewhat less impact in terms of employment rates among the respondents.

## **Of the Persons Who Were Working and Still Off Food Stamps, More Than 80 Percent Were Working at Least 30 Hours per Week**

Of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps, two-thirds of the employed respondents in one-parent cases were working 40 or more hours per week, and 91 percent were working 30 or more hours per week. Among Cohort Two, 69 percent of employed respondents in one-parent cases were working 40 or more hours per week, and 86 percent were working 30 or more hours per week.

The comparable figures for employed respondents in two-parent cases were somewhat lower. In Cohort One, for example, 81 percent of employed respondents in two-parent cases were working 30 or more hours. The percentage for Cohort Two was 85 percent. In many two-parent cases, however, the work hours of the respondents were supplemented by the employment of the spouse/partner.

## **More than 70 Percent of the Employed Persons Who Were Still off Food Stamps Were Earning Over \$1,000 Per Month, But About 10 Percent Were Earning Less than \$750 Per Month**

Of the respondents who were employed and still off Food Stamps, 73 percent of the Cohort One and 71 percent of Cohort Two were earning more than \$1,000 per month. Median monthly earnings in one-parent cases were about \$1,300 in both samples. However, 9 percent of employed single parents in Cohort One were earning less than \$750 per month. For Cohort Two, the figure was 11 percent. Median monthly earnings among employed respondents in two-parent cases were somewhat lower (about \$1,200), but these earnings were supplemented by the wages of the spouse in many cases. Earnings were higher for persons who had attended college, especially in Cohort Two.

Statewide data for 2000 show that the average monthly earnings of employed workers in South Carolina were about \$2,345, based on the UI wage reporting system. Most of the survey respondents, therefore, were earning much less than the statewide average. This is due to the fact that the majority of the leavers were working in low-skilled occupations. Despite this, the majority of employed leavers were financially better off than when they were on Food Stamps, especially since none of them had been receiving TANF benefits.

## **Most Employed Persons Who Were Still off Food Stamps Were Making More than \$7 Per Hour**

Overall, about 60 percent of the employed respondents in Cohort One and 72 percent of the employed respondents in Cohort Two were earning \$7 per hour or higher. Only 20 percent of employed respondents in Cohort One and 14 percent of employed persons in Cohort Two

were earning less than \$6 per hour. Earnings and hourly wage rates varied considerably by occupation, with wages generally higher in manufacturing and office/clerical jobs, and lower in service and retail jobs.

## **Among Unemployed Persons Who Were Still off Food Stamps, the Most Common Reason for Not Working Was the Health Condition of the Respondent**

Among unemployed respondents who were still off Food Stamps, the most common reason given for not working was the health of the respondents. This reason was cited by 33 percent of unemployed respondents in Cohort One and 31 percent of unemployed respondents in Cohort Two. The health condition of a child or other family member was cited by 7 percent of the unemployed respondents in Cohort One and 11 percent of the unemployed respondents in Cohort Two.

In two-parent cases, about one-quarter of unemployed respondents said that they preferred to stay home with their children. In many of these cases, the respondent's spouse or parent was working. Difficulty finding jobs was cited by 11-12 percent of unemployed persons. Child care problems were mentioned by almost 11 percent of unemployed respondents in both cohorts.

## **About 27 Percent of the Persons Who Were Still Off Food Stamps Were Receiving Child Support**

About 27 percent of the respondents who were still off Food Stamps at the time of the surveys reported that they received child support. The percentage was the same for both samples of leavers. In single-parent cases, 39 percent of Cohort One and 33 percent Cohort Two reported that they were receiving child support.

## **Some of the Respondents Who Were Still Off Food Stamps Had Very Low Household Incomes**

Of the Cohort respondents who were still off Food Stamps, 6 percent reported that they had total household income of less than \$500 per month, including earnings, child support, SSI, unemployment benefits, and other cash income. About 21 percent had household income below \$1,000 per month. Among Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps, 11 percent had household income below \$500 and 37 percent had income below \$1,000 per month.

In one-parent cases, about 28-29 percent of the respondents who were still off Food Stamps identified child support as a primary source of income. About 14 percent of Cohort One and 19 percent of Cohort Two identified SSI as a primary source of income.

## **A Majority of the Respondents Who Were Still off Food Stamps Had Household Incomes That Might Make them Eligible for Food Stamp Benefits**

An analysis of total household income showed that 55 percent of the Cohort One families who were still off Food Stamps, and 72 percent of the Cohort Two families who were still off Food Stamps, were below 130 percent of the poverty level, indicating that they might potentially be eligible to receive Food Stamps. Overall, 35 percent of the Cohort One families who were still off Food Stamps were living below the poverty level. The percentage for Cohort Two was 41 percent. One-parent families were more likely than two-parent families to be living below poverty.

## **Respondents Who Cited Administrative Hassles or Pride/Dignity as Reasons for Not Being on Food Stamps Were More Likely than Other Respondents to be Potentially Still Eligible for Food Stamps**

Administrative hassles, pride/dignity, and related factors were cited by a significant number of respondents. For example, about 24 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps said that a major reason why they were not on Food Stamps was that they did not want to deal with the program. This included not wishing to deal with the hassles of the program, difficulty complying with paperwork and reporting requirements, not wanting to be on Food Stamps because of pride or dignity, and simply not wishing to be on Food Stamps.

Of the Cohort One respondents who said that they were off Food Stamps because of administrative hassles, pride/dignity, or because they simply did not want to be on Food Stamps, 67 percent were living below 130 percent of poverty. Almost 49 percent were living below 100 percent of poverty. In contrast, only 42 percent of the respondents who said that they were off Food Stamps because of employment and earnings had household incomes below 130 percent of poverty, and only 21 percent were below 100 percent of poverty. Similar overall results were found for Cohort Two.

## **Many Respondents Reported an Increase in Minor Hardships Since Leaving Food Stamps but Few Reported the More Serious Hardships, Such as Going Without Heat or Electricity, Being Homeless, or Having to Place Their Children With Someone Else**

Many of the survey respondents who were still off Food Stamps reported an increase in minor hardships in the year since leaving Food Stamps – such as having problems with utility bills or rent payments. However, relatively few respondents reported the more serious types of hardship, such as having heat or electricity cut off, being homeless, or having to place their children with someone else.

About 10 percent of Cohort One respondents had their electricity cut off at some time in the year since leaving Food Stamps, compared to 7 percent in the period before leaving Food Stamps. Among Cohort Two, the percentage increased from 3 percent to 11 percent. Almost 6 percent of Cohort One had gone without heat at some time in the past year, and 8

percent had gone without water – only slightly higher than before leaving Food Stamps. About 7 percent of Cohort Two had gone without heat at some time in the past year, and 8 percent had gone without water – both increases from the year before leaving Food Stamps.

Only 1.6 percent of Cohort One and 4.8 percent of Cohort Two reported that they had to place their children with someone else in the past year, and less than 1 percent of persons in either sample had stayed in a homeless shelter.

## **Impact of the Recession -- the Cohort Two Respondents Were More Likely Than the Cohort One Respondents to Report an Increase in Hardships in the Past Year. This May Have Reflected the Impact of the Recession**

One of the key findings from the surveys is that respondents in Cohort Two reported experiencing more hardships in the past year than before the last year, while respondents in Cohort One were generally less likely to report an increase in hardships. For example, the percentage who had to move because they could not afford housing increased from 6 percent to 11 percent. The percentage who fell behind on a utility bill increased from 15 percent to 49 percent. There was also a significant increase in the percentage who had gone without heat, water, or electricity, and who had had their telephone cut off. In addition, the percentage who had sent their children to live with someone else for financial reasons increased by a factor of three.

A possible explanation for these findings is that the Cohort Two respondents were dealing with the beginnings of the recession at the time when they were interviewed. In contrast, the Cohort One respondents were interviewed before the recession began.

## **Food Insecurity Increased Among Families Still off Food Stamps**

About 25 percent of Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps reported that there had been times in the past year when they had to cut the size of meals or skip meals due to lack of money. This was an increase from 15 percent in the period before leaving Food Stamps. For Cohort Two, the percentage rose from 9 percent to almost 31 percent.

The percentage of respondents who reported that they had to skip meals or cut the size of meals in the past year did not vary by current employment status. However, the percentage was much higher among whites than among blacks.

Of the respondents who reported having to cut the size of meals or skip meals in the past year, almost 37 percent said that it happened every month, an increase from 27 percent for the period before leaving Food Stamps. Overall, 9 percent of the respondents reported that they had to skip meals or cut the size of meals every month in the past year.

About 27 percent of Cohort One respondents reported that there had been times in the past year when they had eaten less than they felt they should because of lack of money to buy food. This was an increase from 22 percent before leaving Food Stamps. For Cohort Two,

the percentage increased from 11 percent to 26 percent. Almost 11 percent of Cohort One reported that there had been times in the past year when they were hungry but did not eat. This was unchanged from the period before leaving Food Stamps. Among Cohort Two, the percentage increased from 5.0 percent to 7.6 percent.

The short version of the USDA's food security index was used to measure food security among Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps. About 53 percent of the respondents were food secure, almost 32 percent were food insecure without hunger, and 15 percent were food insecure with hunger. About 18 percent of the one-parent cases were food insecure with hunger.

### **Persons Who Were Unemployed and Not Living with an Employed Adult Were Especially at Risk of Hunger, as Measured by the USDA Food Security Index**

Among the Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps, food security did not vary much in terms of the employment status of the respondents themselves. However, food insecurity was especially high among persons who were not working and not living with an employed adult – about 27 percent of these respondents were food insecure with hunger.

### **About 10 Percent of the Respondents Reported Problems with Access to Health Care Since Leaving Food Stamps -- Largely Unchanged from the Period Before leaving Food Stamps**

In both samples, about 10 percent of the persons who were still off Food Stamps reported that there had been times in the past year when they needed medical care for a family member but could not afford it. This compares to 9 percent for the period before leaving Food Stamps. Respondents in two-parent cases were more likely than respondents in one-parent cases to report having a problem with health care access since leaving Food Stamps.

Almost 20 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were not currently on Medicaid reported a problem with health care access in the past year. The percentage for Cohort Two families not on Medicaid was 15 percent. Whites were somewhat more likely than blacks to report having a problem with health care access.

About 21 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps reported that they or someone whom they lived with did not have health care coverage, including 25 percent of the respondents in one-parent cases, but only 18 percent of the respondents in two-parent cases. Among Cohort Two, however, only 13 percent reported that they or someone they lived with did not have health coverage. About 5 percent of the Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps reported that they had at least one child without health coverage.

## **A Majority of the Families Who Were Still Off Food Stamps Reported That They or Someone in Their Household Were Getting Medicaid Benefits**

Overall, 65 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps reported that they or a household member were enrolled in Medicaid, including 72 percent of the two-parent families but only 59 percent of the one-parent families. Of the Cohort Two respondents still off Food Stamps, 72 percent reported that they or a household member were using Medicaid. Almost 9 percent of Cohort One and 13 percent of Cohort Two were receiving SSI.

## **There Was Little Evidence That Child Behavior, Temperament, or School Performance Had Been Negatively Affected by the Parent(s) Leaving Food Stamps**

Respondents who were still off Food Stamps were asked a series of questions about changes in the behavior, attitudes, temperament, and school performance of their children in the past year. The major goal of the analysis was to determine whether there was any evidence that leaving Food Stamps was associated with negative child outcomes. Overall, less than 10 percent of the respondents in either sample reported that their child's behavior, temperament, or school performance had worsened in the last year. Many of the respondents reported improvement in child behavior, temperament, and school performance, but this may have been due to normal child development or other factors. For several of the measures, child outcomes were better among employed respondents, blacks, more educated respondents, and two-parent families. However, the impact of these variables was not always consistent across the two samples.

## **The Majority of the Respondents Who Were Still Off Food Stamps Rated Their Child's Health as Excellent or Very Good**

Almost 41 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps rated their child's health as excellent, and 26 percent rated it very good. For Cohort Two, the percentages were 36 percent and 27 percent. About 8 percent of Cohort One and 10 percent of Cohort Two rated their child's health as fair or poor. Only 1.4 percent of Cohort One and 3.5 percent of Cohort Two rated their child's health as being worse than a year ago. About 91 percent of the leavers in both samples reported that they had a regular source of medical care for their children.

## **Most of the Respondents Who Were Still off Food Stamps Thought That Life Was Better Since Leaving Food Stamps**

Almost 87 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps agreed with the statement that life was better since leaving the Food Stamps. For Cohort Two, the figure was 85 percent. However, almost 58 percent of Cohort One and 52 percent of Cohort Two also agreed with the statement that they worried more about their family than a year ago. Respondents who were unemployed were much more likely than employed respondents to be more worried about their families than a year previously.

## **A Large Percentage of the Respondents Experienced Changes in Household Composition After Leaving Food Stamps**

The follow-up surveys found that family structure among the respondents changed considerably during the 12 months after they left Food Stamps, especially for two-parent families. Among the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps at the time of the surveys, 23 percent of the two-parent sample were no longer living with a spouse or partner, and 17 percent said that no other adults were living in the household. Among Cohort Two, about 32 percent of the respondents in the two-parent sample were no longer living with a spouse or partner. Of the one-parent cases in Cohort One, 18 percent were now living with a spouse or partner. Of the one-parent cases in Cohort Two, almost 12 percent were now living with a spouse or partner.

## **More Than a Third of the Single-Parent Respondents Were Living with Another Adult**

About 39 percent of the one-parent cases in Cohort One said that there was at least one other adult in the household. Among Cohort Two, 35 percent of the one-parent sample reported that they were living with at least one other adult.

## **About Half of the Respondents Who Were Still off Food Stamps Had a Child Enrolled in the School Lunch Program, but WIC Enrollment Was Lower**

Almost 47 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were off Food Stamps had a child enrolled in the school lunch program, including 52 percent of the one-parent families and 41 percent of two-parent families. Almost 55 percent of the Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps were using the school lunch program.

Almost 22 percent of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps were enrolled in the WIC program, including 18 percent of one-parent families and 26 percent of two-parent families. Of the Cohort Two respondents who were still off Food Stamps, 15 percent were using the WIC program. It is not known how many of the families might have been eligible for WIC at the time of the surveys.

## **Of the Families Who Were Paying for Child Care, Very Few Were Receiving Assistance with the Payments**

Of the Cohort One respondents who were still off Food Stamps, only 6.3 percent of the one-parent families who were using paid child care for their *pre-school* children were receiving help in paying for the care. For two-parent families, the percentage was 8.6 percent. For Cohort Two, the percentages were 6.7 percent and 4.4 percent. Of the one-parent families in Cohort One who were using paid child care for their *school-age* children, only 12.7 percent were receiving help. The figure for Cohort Two was 10.5 percent.

## **C. IMPLICATIONS OF THE FINDINGS**

The results of the study show some generally positive findings in certain areas, but also raise a number of concerns. The implications of the findings are reviewed briefly below.

### **1. Positive Findings**

On the positive side, about 83 percent of the families who were still off Food Stamps were working or living with an employed adult (this was true for both cohorts). Of those who were employed, more than 80 percent were working at least 30 hours per week. More than 70 percent of the employed respondents were making more than \$1,000 per month. Among persons who were not working, almost one-third of Cohort One and about half of Cohort Two had worked at some time in the past year.

Although there was some evidence that minor hardships had increased among families in the year since they left Food Stamps, there was not a significant increase in the more severe types of hardship, such as homelessness. With regard to poverty, the findings on household income indicate that about 65 percent of the Cohort One families who were still off Food Stamps were living above the poverty level. The figure for Cohort Two was 59 percent. Finally, the data on child behavior, school performance, and child well-being do not indicate any major negative trends in child outcomes among families who had left Food Stamps.

### **2. Areas for Concern and Policy Implications**

While the data on employment and other indicators were positive in many areas, some of the leavers were not faring as well as others. High school drop-outs, in particular, had much lower employment rates and earnings than more educated respondents. The data from the study do not show the precise reasons why high school drop-outs were experiencing problems in the labor market. While part of the problem may simply be related to employer requirements for high school diplomas, another factor may be literacy problems or learning disabilities. Overall, the findings suggest that high school drop-outs in the Food Stamp caseload might benefit from additional services as they try to make the transition toward self-sufficiency.

A second area of concern is the high rate of recidivism among the sample due to employment barriers. Overall, about 26 percent of Cohort One and 29 percent of Cohort Two were back on Food Stamps at the time of the surveys. Recidivism was even higher among one-parent families. Much of the recidivism seems to be related to difficulties finding and keeping good-paying jobs, suggesting that non-welfare Food Stamp leavers might benefit from more help with job search assistance, job referrals, and other employment-related services. Recidivism rates were also much higher for respondents who had not completed high school (about 40 percent for both cohorts), indicating that they were experiencing significant problems leaving the Food Stamp rolls on a permanent basis.

With regard to food security, the findings suggest that while there was not a major increase in hunger after families left Food Stamps, food insecurity did increase, especially for one-parent families. The findings indicate that many of the families remained at risk of hunger, particularly high school drop-outs and other respondents who were having trouble staying employed. The persons most at risk of hunger were those who were not working and not living with an employed adult. About 27 percent of the respondents in this group in Cohort Two were food insecure with hunger present.

In terms of poverty, about 35 percent of families who were off Food Stamps in Cohort One were still living below the poverty level. The figure for Cohort Two was 41 percent. One-parent families, high school drop-outs, and respondents aged 30 and over were the most likely to be living below the poverty level. In the area of health care, about 21 percent of Cohort One families who were still off Food Stamps did not have health care coverage. The figure for Cohort Two was 13 percent. About 10 percent of both samples reported problems paying for medical care in the past year.

Another area of concern is that a large percentage of Food Stamp leavers seemed to be staying off Food Stamps for reasons related to administrative hassles or reluctance to access the program. About 24 percent of the families who were still off Food Stamps at the time of the survey said that they were staying off the program because of administrative requirements, pride/dignity, and other factors unrelated to employment. The data suggest that as many as two-thirds of these families might still be eligible for Food Stamp benefits based on household income, (although some of these families may be over the asset limit). In regard to policy implications, more steps may have to be taken to address problems encountered by families in accessing benefits, including recertification requirements, reporting of income changes, and verification requirements.

Closely related to this issue is the broader question of Food Stamp participation rates among eligible low-income families. The study indicates that as many as 55 percent of all the Cohort One families who were still off Food Stamps might still have been eligible for benefits based on household income. The figure for Cohort Two was even higher at 72 percent. Since we do not have complete information on the assets of these households and other factors that may affect eligibility, it is not possible to determine how many would actually have qualified for benefits. In addition, some of the families might have been eligible for only small amounts of Food Stamps because of their earnings. However, the study suggests that many of the families who were no longer on Food Stamps were still eligible for benefits.